



# NEWS RELEASE

OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY  
WESTERN DISTRICT OF MISSOURI

**TODD P. GRAVES**

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Contact Don Ledford, Public Affairs • (816) 426-4220 • 400 East Ninth Street, Room 5510 • Kansas City, MO 64106

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **FEDERAL JURY CONVICTS THREE SOUTHWEST MISSOURI RESIDENTS IN OPERATION COCAINE COWBOYS**

**SPRINGFIELD, Mo.** – Todd P. Graves, United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, announced that three southwest Missouri defendants have been convicted by a federal jury for their role in a conspiracy to distribute cocaine and methamphetamine. All three defendants were indicted as part of Operation Cocaine Cowboys, which charged 36 federal defendants with illegal drug trafficking and firearms sales in Jasper County and elsewhere in southwest Missouri.

**Samuel M. Burton**, 37, of Carthage, Missouri; **Juan Reyes**, 32, of Stotts City, Missouri; and **Marisela Gonzalez Huerta**, 34, of Anderson, Missouri; were convicted of all federal charges related to a conspiracy to distribute cocaine. **Burton** was charged in six counts contained in a 52-count superceding indictment returned by a federal grand jury in Springfield on February 28, 2002. **Reyes** was charged in three counts of that indictment. **Huerta** was charged in one count of that indictment. In addition to those charges, each of the defendants was also convicted of a criminal forfeiture count of that indictment, which requires them to forfeit to the United States \$32,255.

Following the trial of **Burton, Reyes and Huerta**, a U.S. District Court jury in Springfield deliberated about eight hours before returning the guilty verdicts to U.S. District Judge Richard E. Dorr on November 13, 2002, ending a trial that began November 5, 2002.

**Burton, Reyes, and Huerta** are among 19 co-defendants in the case of *United States v. Caasimoro G. Gonzales, et al.* Graves explained that this case was part of a series of federal indictments and federal criminal complaints filed in January and February 2002 as a result of the 27-month multi-agency investigation into illegal drug trafficking and firearms sales.

**(MORE)**

## COCAINE COWBOYS

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Operation Cocaine Cowboys focused on an organization of individuals who were allegedly responsible for the delivery and distribution of multi-kilogram quantities of cocaine, methamphetamine, marijuana and other drugs from sources in California, Texas and Guatemala. As charged in a series of federal indictments and federal criminal complaints, Graves explained, 36 federal defendants allegedly distributed illegal narcotics, primarily in Jasper County, but also in at least four other southwest Missouri counties (Christian, Greene, Lawrence and Webster) and elsewhere. Graves said that undercover officers made numerous purchases of illegal drugs and weapons as part of the investigation. In addition to the federal defendants, about 26 other individuals, including adults and juveniles, face a variety of state charges in related cases, primarily in Jasper County.

Of those 36 federal defendants, Graves said, 31 have been convicted and three remain fugitives. Charges against two defendants were dismissed in favor of state prosecution.

**Burton** was found guilty of a conspiracy to distribute in excess of 500 grams of cocaine in Jasper, Lawrence, Webster, and Greene Counties between November 14, 1999 and November 25, 2001. **Burton** was also found guilty of five counts of distributing cocaine.

As a result of his conviction, **Burton** could be subject to a sentence of up no less than 10 years up to life imprisonment without parole. Sentencing will be determined according to federal sentencing guidelines.

**Reyes** was found guilty of a conspiracy to distribute cocaine in Jasper, Lawrence, Webster, and Greene Counties between November 14, 1999 and November 25, 2001. **Reyes** was also found guilty of one count of distributing cocaine and one count of possession of a firearm in furtherance of those crimes.

As a result of his conviction, **Reyes** could be subject to a sentence of no less than five years up to 45 years in prison without parole. Sentencing will be determined according to federal sentencing guidelines.

**Huerta** was found guilty of a conspiracy to distribute cocaine in Jasper, Lawrence, Webster, and Greene Counties between November 14, 1999 and November 25, 2001.

As a result of her conviction, **Huerta** could be subject to a sentence of up to 20 years in prison without parole. Sentencing will be determined according to federal sentencing guidelines.

Sentencing hearings for each of the defendants will be scheduled sometime after the completion of presentence investigations by the U.S. Probation Office.

(MORE)

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The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Randall D. Eggert. Operation Cocaine Cowboys was investigated by officers from the Missouri State Highway Patrol and the Combined Ozarks Multijurisdictional Enforcement Team (COMET), in cooperation with numerous other law enforcement agencies, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Bureau of Alcohol, tobacco and Firearms, U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, Jasper County Drug Task Force, Mid-States Organized Crime Information Center (MOCIC), and the Carthage Police Department. Assistance to Operation Cocaine Cowboys was provided by the Greene, Jasper and Stone county sheriff's departments, the Joplin, Springfield, Oronogo and Webb City police departments, and the U.S. Marshals Service.

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This news release, as well as additional information about the office of the United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, is available on-line at

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